# *APPENDIX*

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## FIRST NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON RADIO READING SERVICES
### Summary of Highlights

### Oklahoma City, Okla., March 10-13, 1975

**[Editor's Note: The following summary is based on reports given during the conference or prepared following its conclusion by Frank Kurt Cylke, Chief of the Library of Congress Division for the Blind and Physically Handicapped; Patricia S. Smith, Director of the Information Department, American Foundation for the Blind; and Travis Harris, Visual Services Director, Oklahoma Division of Visual Services.]**

The first National Conference on Radio Reading Services (RRS), held in Oklahoma City, Okla., March 10 through 13, drew an attendance of 200 for wide-ranging presentations and discussions covering every aspect of the subject.

Those attending represented organizations of and for the blind, existing radio reading service programs, regional libraries for the blind and physically handicapped, public broadcasting stations, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, agencies planning to initiate RRS, manufacturers of special receivers needed for some programs, and interested blind persons.

The American Foundation for the Blind of New York City sponsored the conference, and the Oklahoma Division of Visual Services was the host agency. William Gallagher, Director of the AFB Program Planning Department, was conference coordinator.

AFB has coordinated the efforts of an ad hoc steering committee exploring the kind and extent of radio reading services, a relatively new community service for blind and physically handicapped individuals who cannot read conventional print. It was the efforts of this committee over the last several months that led to the Oklahoma City conference.

As a background for discussions, participants received copies of a draft handbook, tentatively titled "Radio Information Services." It contains the results of an extensive study of existing services conducted by CPB and prepared by Sam Holt, CPB Editorial Consultant. The handbook will be published this summer in print, braille, and recorded editions. Mr. Holt and Cheryl Strange, also of CPB, reviewed the draft document the first evening for visually handicapped participants.

Most of the radio reading service programs now operating are broadcast on secondary (SCA) channels of FM channels. They cannot be received on a regular FM receiver but require a special receiver for that particular frequency. The needed receivers are usually loaned or rented for a small fee to blind and handicapped listeners by the station or agency sponsoring the services.

As of December 31, 1974, there were 22 such programs operating in the country, according to CPB. Of this number, 16 were closed channel stations (using subchannels of FM channels), and six were broadcasting on open radio channels. A number of additional, new services are planned, however, according to Thomas Warnock, CPB Director of Radio Activities, who predicted there will be 50 or 60 in operation within three years.

Travis Harris, ODVS director, who conceived the plan for holding a national conference on reading radio services, gave the welcoming remarks. C. Stanley Potter, Director of the Minnesota Services for the Blind and Visually Handicapped, St. Paul, presented the keynote address, "Why Radio Reading Services for Blind and Physically Handicapped Persons?" Minnesota pioneered radio reading services in 1969, and has since established a second station, enabling the services to reach a much larger audience.

Mr. Holt, in a statement early in the conference, said that "radio reading service programming is designed to provide an alternative means of receiving information already accessible to others in print. Radio reading is an inefficient way for print readers to get such information, and its appeal is likely limited. Consequently, in direct proportion to the success of its tailoring to its audience, such programming will be of limited appeal to a broader audience. Thus, the more of this programming a station considers offering, the more inclined a station manager will be to separate it in some way from other services.

"Such separations in time," he said, "may defeat the purposes of the service, for the print-handicapped live by schedules like the rest of the population. Therefore, the separation is often accomplished by a

move not in time but in spectrum: by putting the service on subchannels."

Aspects of the subject covered during the conference were administration of a station providing special programming for blind and handicapped persons; the content of programming (most of which consists of reading local newspapers, magazines, and books not otherwise available to the intended audience); open-circuit versus closed-circuit broadcasting; special engineering and technical problems of subchannel broadcasting; funding and the raising of needed funds; need for an exchange of information; prospective agencies to serve as distributors of the special receivers needed in subchannel broadcasting; and possible legal problems. The latter include regulations of the Federal Communications Commission governing subcarrier channels; handling of the issues arising related to copyright of the printed matter to be read; and the roles of various organizations of and for the blind, public broadcasting stations, and the CPB.

Other speakers were Frank Kurt Cylke, Chief, Division for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Library of Congress; Bill McIlvain, Administrative Librarian, Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped; Florence Grannis, Librarian, Iowa Commission for the Blind; Joanne Jonson, Dorothy Pederson, and Robert Watson, Minnesota Talking Book; Robert A. Woods, General Counsel, National Association of Educational Broadcasters; Elaine Davenport, Coordinator, and John Kean, Technical Engineer, Seattle (Wash.) Talking Book; Gordon Randell, Engineer, Oklahoma RRS; Rev. Boniface L. Wittenbrink, Director, WMRY Talking Book, Belleville, Ill.; George T. Holloway, Executive Director, National Catholic Development Conference; Robert H. Whitstock, Vice President for Field Service, The Seeing Eye, Inc.; B. T. Kimbrough, Editor, *Dialogue* magazine; Arthur Zigouras, Director of Public Education, and Patricia S. Smith, Director, Information Department, AFB.

Mr. Cylke, in his presentation, discussed radio reading services in the framework of the development of efficient, cost-effective information delivery systems for blind and physically handicapped citizens. He described the services provided by the Division for the Blind and Physically Handicapped and the national network of cooperating libraries, other agencies, and volunteers with which the division works to meet reading needs. The scope of the materials provided by the Library of Congress, he said, is obviously limited to those titles with a reasonably large readership. He took note of the use being made of some Library of Congress-produced books in RRS programming.

The structure of the conference allowed ample time for question-and-answer periods following addresses and panel discussions, and each session provoked considerable response from participants. A recurring theme in the questions and observations was the need for "consumer input" into program planning and also into national planning. Representatives and members of both the National Federation of the Blind and the American Council of the Blind were particularly vocal on this subject.

Participants agreed that public radio stations are particularly appropriate vehicles for delivering services for the handicapped. These stations are experienced in providing services for various target audiences, and a service for the handicapped often is a logical addition to the station's overall service. Despite organizational and funding problems, therefore, the public radio station and the RRS programming agency often are able to establish relationships and work well together.

There was a consensus that the steering committee which organized the conference under AFB auspices should be enlarged and should continue to plan future meetings and activities and to solve problems common to RRS agencies. Recommended for inclusion in the expanded group were representatives of existing RRS stations, public radio, and organizations of and agencies for the blind.

An important step has been taken to keep conference participants informed about developments in the field. AFB will produce and distribute to participants, for the next several months, a bimonthly publication titled *Radio Talking Book Newsletter.* The newsletter has been produced and distributed to a limited number for the last few years by Seattle RTB. Mrs. Davenport, Seattle RTB, will continue as editor.

Mr. Harris and Mr. McIlvain directed tours of the Oklahoma Educational Radio Talking Book Network offices and the Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, respectively. The network is operated by the Division of Visual Services within the Oklahoma Department of Institutions, Social and Rehabilitative Services. The recent addition of a second station to the network will make the service available to most of the residents of the state who are eligible to receive it. The potential audience is estimated at 12,000. Programming is done at network offices and transmitted by FM subcarrier broadcast over station KJAK-FM, Oklahoma City, since July

1973, and over KKUL-FM, Tulsa, since last March. The Oklahoma Cable Television Association is also cooperating in transmission, thus enabling the network to reach a wider audience.

The Oklahoma sponsors perceive the service as an innovative rehabilitative concept for blind and physically handicapped individuals. As the latter benefit from the daily fare of local news, current events, and recreational and vocational information, their families and friends also gain knowledge of the abilities of other handicapped individuals. The programming staff includes a director and programmer, a chief and two assistant engineers, coordinator of volunteers, secretaries, clerks, and several technicians. Equipment includes a broadcasting console, two sound studios, six taping booths, four broadcasting decks, one continuously-variable-speed turntable, two broadcase cassette decks, two broadcast cartridge decks, two phone patches, equipment for remote transmission, and a crystal-controlled receiver for each listener. These broadcasting/taping facilities occupy 3,000 square feet of library space.

Volunteers are a vital element in the program. They read the local newspapers daily and record books, magazine articles, and other selected topical material for broadcast. They also may assist the library staff with clerical work, shelving books, operating duplicating equipment, and selecting material for readers.

Before being scheduled for taping or broadcasting, each volunteer receives an audition. The audition tapes are evaluated by a board made up of RTB listeners and are rated as suitable or unsuitable for taping or broadcast. There is great emphasis in the program on consumer participation; an advisory committee of blind or physically handicapped listeners is quite active.

One of the most popular programs is a triweekly talk show, during which special guests are interviewed and discussions presented on many controversial topics of both general and specific interest. Because listeners anywhere in the state can call toll free to participate in the discussions, the talk show serves as an open forum for the blind and physically handicapped.

Any book or program broadcast is available to listeners from the Oklahoma regional library. Although it often is impossible for a person to read an entire book at the time it is broadcast, exposure to part of the book frequently generates enough interest to merit a patron's requesting a copy to read at home. The close relationship between the library and the radio service is a boon to readers, resulting in the availability of more materials and offering a means of promoting reading.

Oklahoma officials responsible for the service feel that it has helped to bring about a deeper awareness of the abilities of the handicapped, not only to the handicapped themselves but also to their communities. Organizations and individuals involved in helping to inform, educate, and entertain the handicapped, in the official view, are the ones most likely to understand, accept, and employ them.

The status of radio services by state as of May 1974 follows, based on data compiled by the steering committee prior to the conference. For those states in which there was no known interest, no entries are given.

### ALABAMA

The Helen Keller School for the Blind, Talladega, had requested state funds and had hoped to begin broadcasting this year.

### CALIFORNIA

There are two stations: KQED-FM, programming the reading of newspapers daily at 2 p.m. and 9 p.m.; and KPJC-FM, readings from the talking-book collection by the drama class at Foothill College, Los Altos Hills.

### DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Washington Ear, Inc., a non-profit corporation, broadcasts within a 50-mile radius of WETA-FM, Arlington, Va., thus serving part of a three-state area.

### FLORIDA

In a statewide survey of potential listeners, 77 percent expressed interest, and 60 percent said they were willing to buy a $50 receiver.

### ILLINOIS

Services are broadcast from Belleville, which also serves St. Louis, Mo. WMRY-FM has loaned 700 receivers, sponsored by the Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows. *Dialogue* magazine, Chicago, is negotiating to establish a station.

### IOWA

An open-circuit FM system serves a nine-county area surrounding Des Moines.

### KANSAS

KANU-FM broadcasts 72 hours a week from the University of Kansas in Lawrence, reaching over 520 in the eastern part of the state and in western Missouri. There are plans for a second station in western Kansas.

### MICHIGAN

WKAR at Michigan State University, Lansing, broadcasts four hours of newspapers and magazines

daily. WFBE-FM, Flint, provides two hours of programming a week.

MINNESOTA

Programs originate from two locations: the main studios in St. Paul at the offices of the State Services for the Blind, and Station KSJR-FM, St. John's University, Collegeville. Both broadcast from 6 a.m. to 1 a.m. daily and publish an informative monthly calendar of programs and events.

NEBRASKA

KOOS-FM, operated by the Omaha school system, had planned a program.

NEW JERSEY

Educational Talking Book Service is broadcasting over WSOU-FM, Seton Hall University, South Orange.

NEW MEXICO

New Mexico Services for the Blind in Santa Fe is conducting a feasibility study.

NEW YORK

Albany and New York City are planning a broadcast network.

NORTH DAKOTA

The State Department of Vocational Rehabilitation sponsored enabling legislation for RRS, which was defeated.

OHIO

Youngstown State University's WYSU-FM broadcasts to several nearby counties and also reaches into Pennsylvania. Bowling Green also has a station.

OREGON

The Seeing Sound, Portland, broadcasts 12 hours each Sunday over KBPS (open circuit).

PENNSYLVANIA

There are three stations: WQLN, Erie, on the air since July 1973, broadcasts 15 hours a day, with the Lions Club underwriting three-fourths of the cost of the receivers; WLAN-FM, Lancaster, leases receivers for $10 a year, and was funded by Lions International, Junior League, and other organizations; and a third station, in Philadelphia, which is operated by Delaware Valley Radio Information Services, funded for the first two years by the Nevil Foundation.

RHODE ISLAND

The state began to explore the possibility of establishing a program in 1973.

SOUTH CAROLINA

South Carolina Educational Radio for the Blind, Greenville, began transmission in 1972 over a subcarrier channel of WEPR-FM. It is on the air 40 to 45 hours a week, reaching listeners within a 60-75 mile radius. The station has distributed 500 receivers.

SOUTH DAKOTA

Sioux Falls hopes to work with Minnesota organizations on the preparation of local supplements to basic programming.

TENNESSEE

WPLN, Nashville, has a talking library and plans a radio service.

TEXAS

The State Commission for the Blind planned to go on the air in 1974 on a privately operated station, with the commission supplying the receivers.

VIRGINIA

Virginia State Library for the Blind, Richmond, has expressed interest in beginning service.

WASHINGTON

Seattle Public Library and the Library for the Blind broadcast 86 hours a week to 500 listeners.

WEST VIRGINIA

The School for the Blind, Romney, operates a short-range station.

WISCONSIN

The Wisconsin Council of the Blind has expressed interest in establishing services.